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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 007677

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/26/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TU](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: IRAQ: GOT DISMAYED THAT IECI LIKELY TO THROW OUT
OCV RESULTS FROM ISTANBUL

REF: FORD-BURGER EMAIL 12/22/05

Classified By: Counselor for Political-Military Affairs Timothy A. Bett
s for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

This is a joint Embassy Ankara-ConGen Istanbul message.

Summary

[11.](#) (C) The Turkish MFA is dismayed that the Independent Election Commission of Iraq (IECI) is considering throwing out the results of out-of-country voting (OCV) in Istanbul for the recent elections. A Turkish official told us that if the IECI does take this step -- especially if it does not acknowledge claims that the Kurds carried out massive fraud in Kirkuk -- the Turkish public will view the elections as skewed against the Iraqi Turkmen. Two Turks who observed the OCV in Istanbul reported to us that the conditions there appeared ripe for malfeasance, though they did not recount having witnessed massive fraud directly. Regrettably, our information is second-hand because -- unlike in January -- diplomatic missions were not invited to observe OCV in Turkey. End summary.

Say It Ain't So--Voter Fraud in Turkey?

[12.](#) (C) MFA Head of Department for the Middle East Fazli Corman contacted Embassy Dec. 22 to report that the Turkish Embassy in Baghdad had learned that the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq (IECI) had decided to throw out all election results from out-of-country voting (OCV) in Istanbul. Embassy Baghdad confirmed (ref) that (as of Dec. 22) the IECI was considering taking this step due to massive fraud reported by the International Monitoring of the Iraqi Election (IMIE) group, which had observed the Istanbul voting.

[13.](#) (C) We passed this information to Corman Dec. 23. Corman expressed dismay, asking why the IECI would throw out all the results as opposed to investigating the fraud claims further or coming up with another mechanism to deal with the fraud allegations. He said that the appearance in Turkey will be that the IECI will throw out the results in Istanbul -- which, he admitted, would likely heavily favor the Iraqi Turkmen Front (ITF) -- and yet will likely not act in response to Turkmen claims of massive fraud by Kurdish parties in Kirkuk. "If allegations of fraud are good enough in Istanbul, why are they not good enough in Kirkuk?" he asked.

[14.](#) (C) We responded that -- especially as we had not personally observed either the voting in Kirkuk or in Istanbul -- it was up to the IECI to respond to the these concerns. We urged the GOT not let its displeasure over this incident color its evaluation of the elections in Iraq, and to continue its support for Iraq's nascent democracy. Corman responded that a negative public reaction in Turkey is likely if the IECI throws out the voting in Istanbul; such a reaction could complicate the GOT's efforts to be constructive, he said.

What Happened in Istanbul: Two Observers' Views

[15.](#) (C) On Dec. 23, ConGen Istanbul spoke to Berna Turkili (please strictly protect), who observed the voting in Istanbul for IMIE. She said that that while the Canadian IMIE team had not been very well organized, she and other Turkish observers also believed that there were serious organizational problems stemming from poor planning in Baghdad that require double and triple checking the results. Turkili noted several specific issues: absence of holographic seals on the ballots (rendering them easily copiable), lack of representation of different Iraqi communities in polling center staff, and inadequate identification procedures, among others. She also criticized the Kurdish parties for not taking their observation responsibilities seriously; she said the observer only came for a couple hours and spent most of his time smoking in a hallway (NFI).

[16.](#) (C) On Dec. 28, ConGen Istanbul also spoke with Ozgul Erdemli (also strictly protect) of ARI (an NGO, with its roots in center-right party ANAP, that trains up-and-coming politicians), who also served as a election observer for

IMIE. Erdemli reported that there were six observers for the Istanbul sites, two at each of the three polling sites (Sisli, Fatih and Moda). Each polling site consisted of six voting centers, which meant that there were not enough observers to follow all the proceedings closely, especially over three days of voting. Erdemli explained that she had originally been assigned to Sisli, where she understood there were few reports of problems, but she ended up at the Fatih venue, where apparently most of the problems took place. She confirmed Turkili's reports about the ballots - that they could have easily been replicated at any copy shop. She thought multiple voting would have been very possible, and the largest problem in the OCV in Istanbul. Erdemli added that OCV participation in Turkey (including Ankara) increased from 4,000 in January to some 21,000 this time. (NOTE: Both Erdemli and the Iraqi Embassy here told us that -- unlike in January -- Iraqis illegally residing in Turkey were permitted to vote. There are no reliable statistics on how many Iraqis reside in Turkey. Turkish officials claim that the majority of Iraqis living in Turkey are Turkmen who would tend to support the ITF. END NOTE.)

17. (C) According to Erdemli, at four of the six centers in Fatih things went fairly well -- like "window dressing," she said, in contrast to what happened at the entrance to the other two centers, where it seemed there was a problem with the queue control not checking for ink on would-be voters' fingers. There were occasions at lunchtime, too, when busloads of voters appeared and control at entrances was inadequate, leaving plenty of room for confusion and lack of adherence to guidelines.

18. (C) Erdemli reported one instance where a fight broke out among two groups of youths (after the arrival of a bus carrying Iraqis from Bulgaria), and at one point someone had something like liquid bleach thrown in their eyes. Erdemli said she could think of no other reason to bring bleach to the polling place other than to wipe off ink in order to double-vote.

19. (C) Erdemli stressed that she had heard there was massive fraud in Germany as well, this time on the part of the Kurds. If the elections in Istanbul are thrown out, she thought it would create "big problems" for the GOT if the two situations were not handled equally. Erdemli admitted that while there may have been some fraud in Istanbul, she is concerned that the votes of thousands of sincere voters could be cast aside as a result.

COMMENT: Wish We had Been There Ourselves

110. (C) The two observers with whom we spoke paint a picture of election fraud waiting to happen, even if they did not see it actually occur. We only regret we were not able to see this for ourselves. The Iraqi Embassy here did not extend an invitation to diplomatic missions to observe OCV in Turkey (in January, IOM made such an offer, and we and many other diplomatic missions did observe the voting, which appeared incident-free).

111. (C) Comment, cont.: On top of their dismay over having many (likely) Turkmen votes thrown out of the Iraqi election, the GOT is likely also embarrassed that Istanbul has been singled out as a center of election fraud. MFA's Corman took pains to tell us that the GOT had no/no role (other than offering up facilities) in organizing or running the OCV in Turkey. While Corman professes not to fully accept the many Turkmen claims of fraud by the Kurds in Kirkuk ("we understand they exaggerate"), he is correct that the Turkish media is likely to raise a fuss if the IECI indeed throws out all the votes from Istanbul but none from Kirkuk. END COMMENT.

WILSON